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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: MELES'S POST-IGAD EXPECTATIONS FOR THE TFG

REF: NAIROBI 2520

Classified By: Counselor for Somalia Unit Bob Patterson. Reasons: 1.4 (b,d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Immediately on the heels of the October 28 - 29 IGAD Extraordinary Summit on Somalia, Assistant Secretary Frazer discussed with Prime Minister Meles the way forward with the faltering Somalia Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and its merger with the Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia (ARS). As he had in public statements during the IGAD event, Meles expressed skepticism about the TFG's prospects. The jury was out on the ARS, he said, but if they are serious he would expect them soon to reach beyond their Hawiye base and improve security in Mogadishu. Absent TFG-ARS progress, Ethiopian troops would withdraw before the end of the year. And he had agreed with President Museveni that Amisom would withdraw in advance of ENDF troops. Meles told A/S Frazer that he had outlined GOE intentions in detail to TFG President Yusuf. He believed Yusuf understood that Ethiopia was "serious" this time. Meles told A/S Frazer that the new, TFG - ARS unity government would have little time to prove itself; there must be measurable progress by the end of November, or ENDF forces would withdraw, leaving a security vacuum. Meles felt the TFG Prime Minister was not capable of governing, and he described the Deputy Prime Minister as lacking the necessary clan power base to be effective. End summary.

Meles Skeptical of TFG

¶12. (C) On October 29, immediately following the closing of the Extraordinary Summit on Somalia (reftel), Prime Minister Meles shared with Assistant Secretary Frazer his expectations of the floundering Somalia Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Meles repeated criticisms he had made publicly at the Summit, calling the TFG "unable to do anything," and "disorganized." The TFG lacked cohesion, he said, and it will need that if the new, TFG - ARS (Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia) unity government was to be effective.

Jury Out on ARS

¶13. (C) Meles was somewhat skeptical of the ARS, whose representatives he said he did not meet, as well. If they were willing to accommodate non-Hawiye interests "then 90 percent of the security problems" would be solved, including in Mogadishu. The next few months will show what the ARS can do, Meles continued. "We will see if they're serious about fighting crime and al-Shabaab, or if they just want to negotiate with al-Shabaab." If the ARS created stability in Mogadishu, Meles added as an afterthought, "then perhaps we

(the ENDF) could have another go at (al-Shabaab controlled) Kismayo." Even if the ENDF withdrew from Mogadishu, Meles said, Ethiopian troops would remain near the capital while TFG and ARS militias took control. (Note: the October 26 Djibouti Cessation of Hostilities Agreement calls for Ethiopian troops to withdraw from certain parts of Mogadishu.) If security in Somalia improved under the unity government, Meles envisioned an extension of the Transitional Federal Charter, due to expire in fall 2009, "for a few years."

ENDF Withdrawal Plans

¶4. (C) Should the new unity government fail, Meles said, the ENDF would withdraw, perhaps before the end of the year. President Museveni and he had agreed that AMISOM troops must withdraw in that case before the ENDF, which would leave a security vacuum in Mogadishu. "With the complete failure of the TFG/ARS unity government, we would be back to square one, to ground zero," Meles said. Later in the conversation, Meles recounted that he had told TFG President Yusuf that "unless (the new unity government) flies, we will withdraw before the end of the year." The GOE would in that case ensure that Yusuf was returned safely to Puntland before its troops departed Somalia. "I think (Yusuf) believes we're serious," Meles said. The GOE now understood that it did not need to be in Somalia in order to counter al-Shabaab. "We can stop them from Ethiopia," Meles concluded.

¶5. (C) Still later in the conversation, Meles returned to an ENDF withdrawal, noting that "if there is hope, perhaps we

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can delay (withdrawal) for a few months into the new year. There would have to be measurable progress by the end of November, he said.

Tight Deadlines for Unity Government

¶6. (C) After A/S Frazer had noted the ARS wish (septel) that the TFG parliament be expanded and a new leadership elected, Meles agreed that the unity government must accommodate the ARS. "The parliament can be either enlarged or replaced, but it must change, and the cabinet must be re-organized," he said. Any re-shuffling of the office of president or prime minister could not be decided by parliament, however, and a wholesale replacement of the TFG with the ARS would "simply displace the violence."

¶7. (C) In response to A/S Frazer's question about the tight deadlines established by the IGAD October 29 communique (reftel), Meles noted only that it was imperative to have the cabinet act in a coordinated fashion. (Note: the October 29 communique calls for the Transitional Federal Institutions to "appoint a cabinet. . . within fifteen days...") In the first two-month review called for in the communique, he would hope to see progress on a cease-fire and a unity government well advanced. If not, Ethiopia would convene an IGAD emergency summit.

PM, DPM Not Players

¶8. (C) Asked by Special Envoy for Somalia John Yates if Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein "Nur Adde" was capable of governing, Meles said only "no." Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Abdisalan Aden had the right clan credentials (Habir Gedr/Ayer) but no power base of his own. Meles acknowledged, however, that "you can talk to him" and "he's very useful."

¶9. (C) Meles agreed with A/S Frazer that ARS Chairman Sheikh Sharif might be a Trojan horse for more radical Islamists. "It is an issue," he said.

¶10. (C) A/S Frazer briefly previewed for Meles the prospect of paying TFG forces. "We are looking at it," she said, and promised to provide Meles with a concept paper that, if Meles thought it feasible, could be presented to the Saudi government. Meles was enthusiastic about the possibility.

Comment

¶11. (C) It was clear that Meles, while willing to give the unity government the benefit of the doubt, expected the new arrangement to fail. Although Meles gave the UN's Special Representative due credit for forging the October 26 Djibouti agreements and bringing the ARS formally into play, his comments suggested that IGAD for him had superseded the UN in Somalia. And with IGAD, at least on Somalia, little more than a figleaf for Ethiopia as the country that has expended the most energy on its ungoverned neighbor and is the most impatient with the meager results, Meles is again threatening to withdraw his troops and re-enter to Somalia when necessary to counter al-Shabaab.

¶12. (U) Assistant Secretary Frazer has cleared this message.
RANNEBERGER